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TAGS: [ECON](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER RAMON TELLS A/S WELCH USG MUST KEEP
PRESSING GOI AND PA ON GAZA CROSSINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer, for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: On August 21 Minister without Portfolio Haim Ramon updated A/S Welch, Ambassador Kurtzer, Acting AID Mission Director Harden and Econoff on the GOI's position on Gaza crossings, particularly the impasse over Rafah. Ramon stressed that Minister of Defense Mofaz remains "totally against" passage through Rafah and any third-party role there. Ambassador Kurtzer suggested that the equipment, technology and real-time coordination proposed for Rafah would go far in meeting Israel's security requirements. A/S Welch added that Egypt, sharing Israel's concerns about security in the Northern Sinai, could also play a positive role. Ramon asserted that PM Sharon would have the final word on any solution and suggested that, although also opposed to a third-party role, Sharon could possibly demonstrate some flexibility on the movement of people. Ramon noted that the GOI's position on Gaza crossings had evolved over time and suggested an incremental approach to solving remaining differences. A/S Welch asked that GOI proposals be implemented quickly as it was imperative that the disengagement show positive results soon. Ramon urged the USG to maintain pressure on both the GOI and the Palestinians to come to agreement on outstanding Gaza issues. He also said that more money would be needed from the international community to adequately upgrade the Gaza crossings. End Summary.

2. (C) In reply to A/S Welch's query on the status of GOI plans for Rafah crossing, Ramon began by reiterating that security concerns remain paramount to the GOI. He asserted that Minister of Defense Mofaz continues to advocate the establishment of an Israeli-controlled border crossing at Kerem Shalom and remains strongly opposed to passage through Rafah and a third-party role there. Nevertheless, Ramon suggested that Sharon could demonstrate some flexibility, possibly agreeing to allow people and goods to exit Gaza through Rafah, and two-way traffic for both at Kerem Shalom.

3. (C) In reply to Ambassador Kurtzer's mention of the equipment and technology proposed for Rafah to enhance security, Ramon reiterated PM Sharon's opposition to a third party role. Sharon, Mofaz and others in the GOI doubt a third party would be able to "exercise its role in the right way," according to Ramon. He cited Israel's experience with UN forces in Lebanon as reason to be wary of third party involvement at Rafah. In addition, any GOI challenge to third party enforcement could complicate GOI relations with Europe. A/S Welch reminded Ramon that the Palestinians, keenly aware of how vital the movement of people and goods would be to achieving economic growth, had placed other issues on hold until an agreement on crossings could be reached. He added that Egypt could play a positive role as it shared GOI concerns over maintaining appropriate security in the northern Sinai.

4. (C) Ramon described the GOI position on crossings as one that has been "evolving." Previously the GOI had declined to accept any crossings through Rafah but now agreed to some. He volunteered that he personally supported, (for the most part), elements of Sa'eb Erakat's proposal and was trying to convince others in the GOI of its merits. However, he insisted that the final decision would be PM Sharon's, who he characterized as the "only player" in this decision. In any case, Ramon believed that, given Israeli concerns, the GOI would likely adopt a "graduated process" in which a solution would be implemented over a period of about six months. A/S Welch noted the need for a solution soon. Ramon replied that the GOI had already taken steps and formulated concrete plans to improve conditions at Erez crossing, but more funds were needed from the international community. He asserted that the plans were in place and the GOI stood ready to ensure that trucks leaving Gaza would face two hours, at most, transiting the crossings, but money was needed to accomplish this goal.

5. (C) A/S Welch stressed that the USG believes it imperative that the GOI's disengagement lead to further progress in the peace process. Ramon agreed and expressed his concern that significant progress would have to be made prior to Palestinian elections, otherwise " Hamas will come."

Ramon urged the USG to remain active at the highest levels to help bring the Israelis and Palestinians together. He agreed that what happens in the next three to four months in Gaza will affect Israelis and Palestinians for a long time to come.

16. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this cable.

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